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Let There Be Peace!

by Rev. Kim Wood, Conference Minister

Too many times these days, the word “why” comes to my mind. Why have people’s deeply sacred, historically blessed homelands been disintegrated to ashes, intermingled with tears of grief and the silenced heartbeats of beloved who lost their lives. Why are the earth’s bellowing rumbles and torrential waters tearing at lives already ravaged by war and oppression? Why do people all claiming to love and be loved by God continue to disregard the beauty and the depth of each other’s relationships with the beloved Creator/Yahweh/Allah/God, convinced that snuffing out one another’s very presence is the way for them to be validated? Why, O God? Why? The more I think “why,” though, the more I have come to believe that this may not be the relevant question for the day. So, I am trying to redirect my questioning, focusing less on a “why” that might never make sense, and, instead, leaning into “what now?”



Last Saturday, October 7th, Hamas launched a surprise attack on Israel during the last day of the seven-day Jewish festival of Sukkot. Within hours, Israel began responding with missile strikes into Gaza. Thousands of people were killed and injured. Hostages were taken, some later executed. This is not the beginning of this story, nor is it the end, and the pain, the suffering, the death, and the oppression have not lessened in my truth-seeking “whys.”

Using words from a recent letter sent by over twenty-five denominations and faith organizations to the United States Congress, including the United

Church of Christ, I “unequivocally condemn Hamas’ attacks and call for the immediate release of all hostages in captivity. [I] also condemn the indiscriminate and violent Israeli response that has already claimed hundreds of civilian lives.”

So here I am, asking, “What now?”

Militant responses of more strikes, more bombs, more murder, and more oppressions cannot resolve this conflict. These will only cause more pain, more suffering, more death and grief, and more fear and hatred. And yet, this seems to be the language our world speaks, the language to which we turn to inflict control and proclaim peace. This is not peace. What now?

When Jesus was preparing the Disciples for his departure, he knew that the world in which he would leave them would not be kind, would not be just, would not be compassionate and receptive to their message of God’s inclusive love and radical, life-changing mercy. He needed to make sure they were equipped for the work, the ministry before them. But he did not leave them with a war plan or an exit route. Instead, as John’s Gospel tells us in the 14th chapter, he prepared them in this way:

- *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.* (John 14:27, NRSVUE).

My siblings, it is too easy to fall into the trap of rallying for war in order to institute quiet and order. But this is not God’s call for us. This is not how Jesus has equipped us. This is not peace.

It may feel small, even insignificant, but I challenge you in these coming days, as the war in Palastine and Israel escalates, as the death and destruction continues in other areas of conflict in our world, as the rhetoric and actions in our own country centers around bringing harm to and attempting to erase beautiful people of God’s creation for the color of their skin, their gender, and their sexuality, to lean into peace. Pray for peace. Call to your family, your friends, your community, your legislators, for peace. Model peace. Act for peace. This is both the gift and the tool that Christ has left for us to use. This is the life we are called to live. Peace I leave with you. If only we will claim that gift and act it into fruition. May we share it and help make it to so!

News from the Conference Office



2023 Retired Servants Retreat a Success

Folks from the Southeast Conference were among the participants at the UCC Retired Servants Retreat, which included retired clergy and laity from the Southern and Southeast Conferences. It was held at Blowing Rock Conference Center, Blowing Rock, NC. View more [photos on our website](#) or [Facebook page](#).

Harp Meditations Resume This Fall

We have taken the summer off, but join us on Zoom the third Thursday of each month at 1:00 PM Eastern/12:00 PM Central for 20 minutes of harp meditation. We will also have time for silent prayer and reflection if desired. Facilitated by Rev. Jean Norton (Vanderkamp).

Register: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83985842108?pwd=R3JtcnErRzc0ZnQwOVBKajkrbDVRQT09>

Requests for Therapeutic Harp Sessions can be scheduled through www.HeartSongAwakenings.com.



Prayer List

We are continuing the process of praying for authorized ministers, congregations, and ministry groups throughout 2023. We encourage you to include these prayer requests in your local church newsletter, share them with your prayer circle, and include them in your own prayers.

Week of October 15

- First United Church UCC; Belvidere, Tennessee
- Soo Man Chang
- Artis Johnson
- Troy Sanders
- J Houston Wheeler
- Cindy Bovee-Kemper

Week of October 22

- Sankofa UCC, Atlanta, Georgia
- Valencia Jackson
- Kwan Hae Chi
- Charmaine Penn Johnson
- Edward Schneider
- Ted Elsenheimer

Week of October 29

- Howard Congregational UCC; Nashville, Tennessee
- Kathy Clark
- Dahron Johnson
- Ann Schoup
- Heather Fosburgh

- Marvin Morgin

Holding in Prayer

Please pray for Rev. Larry Evans.

Churches in Transition

First Congregational, Savannah GA; Trinity Congregational, Athens AL; Holy Trinity Community Church, Nashville TN; Deer Lodge Congregational Church, Deer Lodge TN; Rush Memorial, Atlanta GA; Howard Congregational, Nashville TN; Community Congregational, Montgomery AL; Tuscaloosa UCC, Tuscaloosa AL.

News from the National Setting



Stewardship Theme Materials for 2023

"Because of You, Our Church Changes Lives"

This year's stewardship theme makes the connection between donor generosity and the ministry and mission of your congregation.

Our stewardship materials this year include eight complete worship services, hymn suggestions, sermon starters from eight authors, and faith formation sessions for children, youth, and adults. Materials also provide assets such as logos, commitment cards, bulletin inserts, and letters, plus guidance for your campaign.



Virtually Attend the Installation of the 10th General Minister and President

The United Church of Christ Board is pleased to announce the installation of our 10th General Minister and President, The Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia A. Thompson.

Rev. Thompson was elected General Minister and President at the 34th General Synod on July 3, 2023 in Indianapolis, IN, and took office on August 1. Rev. Thompson is the first woman to serve as General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ.

You are cordially invited to celebrate this historic installation on Friday, October 20, 2023, 5:00 pm ET, at the Lakewood Congregational Church in Lakewood, Ohio where the Rev. Joanna D'Agostino serves as Senior Pastor. The service of installation will also be broadcast online.

You must register online:

https://ucc.zoom.us/webinar/register/1016942041023/WN_SwP7ZZcjQAubcJjuSI-Upw#/registration

Email Subscriptions from the United Church of Christ

Did you know that the United Church of Christ provides weekly and monthly newsletters from many ministries that share stories, action alerts, resources and educational opportunities and more? [Visit the UCC website and learn more about these valuable tools.](#)

Training Opportunities and Conferences

Community Safety for Congregations Training

With the rise of authoritarianism in the US, attacks on queer and trans beloveds both through legislation and right-wing protesters at drag shows, anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric, as well as the censoring of books and school curricula, we are seeing an increase in the targeting of sacred spaces for violence. Across religious traditions, we are seeing online threats, pride and Black Lives Matter banners torn down, hate speech graffiti-ed on synagogues, violent actors appearing at sanctuaries and disrupting services, and more.

So, how can congregations be prepared? Why is this violence escalating, and what community safety practices can we engage in now that also help us build the world we long for? Join us for a 2-part training series for faith communities of all traditions, in which we'll explore the current context of authoritarianism in the US, why faith communities are being targeted, and practical tools and skills your congregation can build and practice together. The training series will be led by Christian, Jewish, and UUA SURJ-Faith leaders.

- Session Two: Road Map to Building Community Safety
- Date: October 18, 8-10pmET / 5-7pmPT

This session will offer a 1, 5, and 10 year road map for building community safety with your congregation, as well as dig in to 2 tools you can begin to practice together. The tools will include de-escalation and strategies for dealing with disruptors. [Register online.](#)



PATHWAYS

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

PATHWAYS Announces New Academic Dean

PATHWAYS Theological Education, Inc. is pleased to announce the appointment of The Rev. Dr. Ruth E. Shaver as Academic Dean of the program. Shaver says, "I started seminary thinking that I would become an academic. God had other plans for the short term, leading me into Christian Education and then parish ministry before I had the opportunity to teach on the faculty of the Penn West Academy. That led me to PATHWAYS and now to this position, where I feel like an academic with the added joy of working in parish ministry. I really do have the best of both worlds."

The appointment of Rev. Dr. Shaver to the role of Academic Dean is a strategic move by the Board of PATHWAYS Theological Education, Inc.:

- *Capitalizing on Shaver's academic qualifications, experience, and expertise in arenas of teaching, coaching, curricular and course development,*
- *Capitalizing on Shaver's on-the-ground local church experience, congregational dynamics, and denominational networks, and*
- *Capitalizing on Shaver's skills in community building within congregations as well as among participants in her PATHWAYS online courses.*

Shaver has been an active member of the PATHWAYS faculty and member of the Board of Directors since 2016. She brings many years of experience as an in-person educator, online course facilitator, and course developer. Since 2019, as chair of PATHWAYS Academic Council (PAC), she has guided the development of several PATHWAYS certificate programs. She coordinated course content updates across the catalog to better reflect the diversity of voices speaking in Progressive theology today.

In representing PATHWAYS at three United Church of Christ (UCC) General Synods and several UCC Conference Annual Meetings, Shaver has become "the face of PATHWAYS". As Academic Dean, she will continue to represent PATHWAYS in similar settings. Shaver looks forward to building relationships with those involved at all levels of the ordination processes.

For more about Dr. Ruth Shaver and PATHWAYS Theological Education go

to pathwaystheological.org. Shaver can be contacted via email at RuthShaver@PathwaysTheological.org

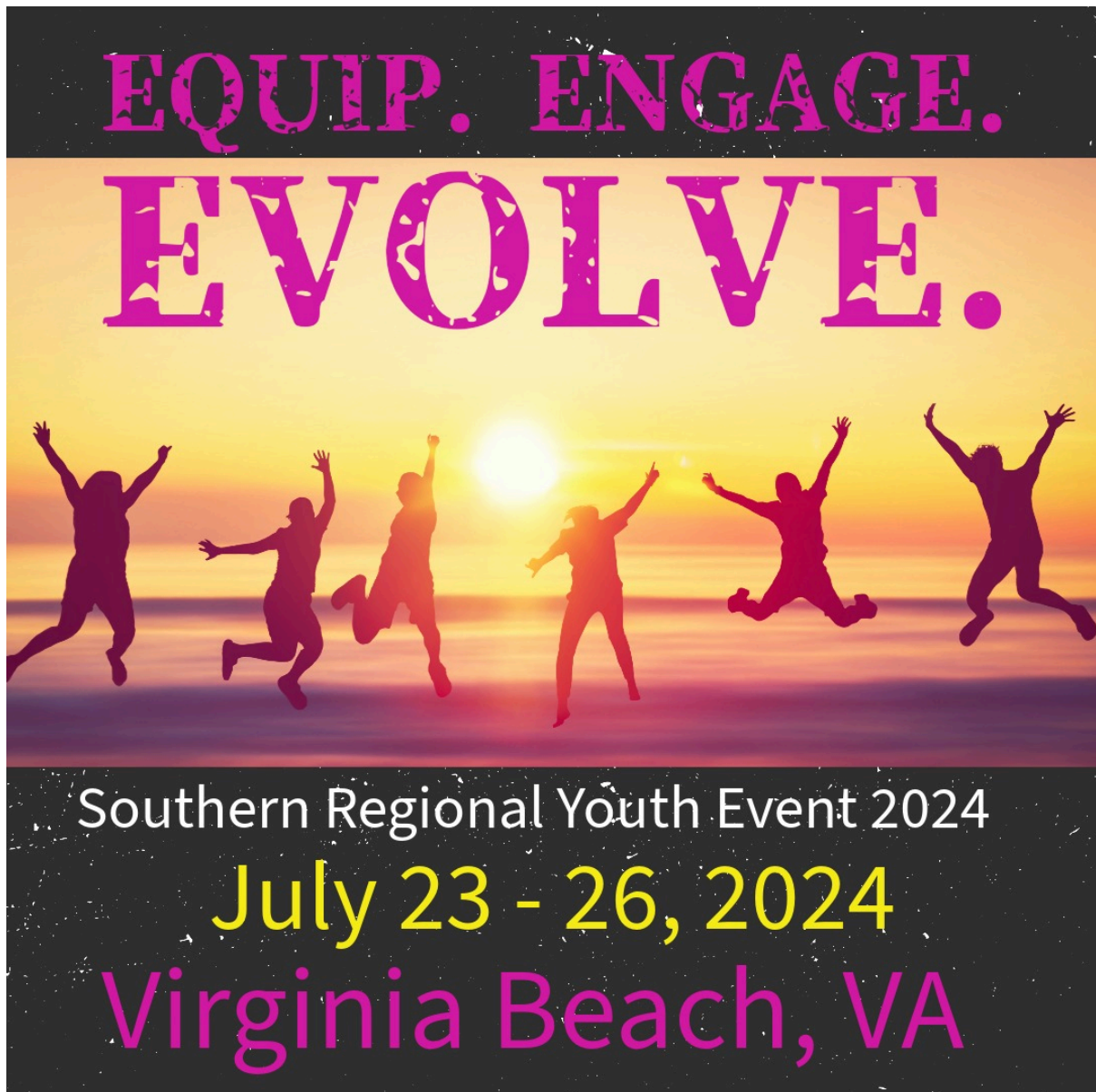


Winter Youth Retreat at Blowing Rock Conference Center

Our friends from Alethea will be joining us for a weekend of storytelling, experiential education, service, and of course fun in the snow on January 12-15, 2024. Registration is now open! Join youth from across the Southeast for a fun experience designed to fuel their faith.

Group Leaders, please [click here to register your full group](#).

Registration is open until December 1, 2023, and is \$208.00 per participant. (Includes lodging, programming, and meals.)



Conference Calendar

October 17 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EDT

[Clergy Conversations via Zoom](#)

October 19 @ 1:00 pm - 1:30 pm EDT

[Live Harp Meditations for Ministers](#)

October 20 @ 5:00 pm - 6:30 pm EDT

[Installation of the 10th General Minister and President](#)

October 24 @ 9:30 am - 11:00 am EDT

[Zoom Conversation for Specialized Ministers](#)

October 24 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EDT

[Clergy Conversations via Zoom](#)

October 31 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EDT

[Clergy Conversations via Zoom](#)

November 3 - November 4

[Healthy Boundaries 101: Fundamentals](#)

View the full calendar of events online: <https://www.secucc.org/events/>

Contact Us

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